

Saturday, April 25th, 2015

Tell Me: with Anne Sherwood Pundyk

by Noah Dillon

I've been visiting — with artists, writers, curators, dealers, and others in the art world — to look at one artwork of my guest's choice. We have a one-on-one conversation about the artwork, what they find interesting in it and why it's important to them. In this edition, painter Anne Sherwood Pundyk and I went to her studio in Mattituck, New York, to look at her ongoing painting project, *The Revolution Will Be Painted*.



Anne Sherwood Pundyk, *The Revolution Will Be Painted* (installation view at the artist's Mattituck studio), 2012-ongoing. Mixed media on canvas, 180 x 132 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

Noah Dillon: So what are we looking at?

Anne Sherwood Pundyk: It's a painting I made last fall called *The Revolution Will Be Painted*. It's 15 feet wide by 11 feet high, on unstretched canvas. It was originally a drop cloth I had used on the floor of several different studios. You can see evidence of this along the unpainted edge. I used latex paint for the large indigo Rorschach shapes and the field of red. The multi-colored chevrons are in acrylic with colored pencil guidelines. Not all of it is visible because it's folded under to fit the wall in my studio here in Mattituck. Since the piece was finished, it has been installed in four different locations. In all instances the painting has been partially hidden, subject to the constraints of the wall configuration and ceiling height of each space.

What's the origin of this painting?

In the fall of 2012 I moved my studio to Bushwick and then TriBeCa; I got the tarp for these spaces. Around that time, the focus of my art writing evolved to an examination of a circle of radical feminist performance artists. Bianca Casady invited me to create with her the magazine *Girls Against God (GAG)*, which is published by Capricious. This became an intensely collaborative time for me involving writing, editing and performance events. Consequently, some of what was going on with the work in my studio was being pulled out of its original concerns and constraints and apart from painting, into universes I felt an affinity with, but hadn't engaged with so directly.

The drop cloth originally intended to protect the floor became the site of gatherings and group projects. (It has pollen, red wine and soy sauce stains to prove it!) By the spring of 2014 I knew I would be moving my studio here to Mattituck permanently. Simultaneously, I began co-curating an exhibition and performance series called "Milk and Night," at Gallery Sensei on the Lower East Side. I'd wanted to paint one of the gallery's walls for my own piece in the show, but it wasn't permitted, so I opted to use my trusted studio tarp to create the monumental effect I wanted for what became *The Revolution Will Be Painted*.

How does this relate to some of the other art that you like, or what you like about art generally? This spans several disciplines, so in addition to painting in the specific



Anne Sherwood Pundyk (center) with collaborators from the YAMS Collective and Clitney Perennial, 2014. Courtesy of the artist.

it seems like it also means a lot to you with regard to art more broadly.

It has to do with Painting, with a capital P. I learned a lot from the activist performance artists and joined their ranks, and continue to be there. But there is amongst some members of this tribe, generally speaking, a lack of appreciation — maybe even disdain — for painting as a medium. As a painter, it felt like a significant misunderstanding. I began to realize that I was among people who maybe wouldn't ever appreciate that about me.

Of course the role of painting — here, now, and historically — is highly contested, but also beloved. It's a medium that's simultaneously well understood *and* mysterious. And it's who I am; I can't separate it from how I picture the world. More to the point, I see painting as a revolutionary act that resides within the individual. Both painting and any personal revolution happens first inside one's own consciousness before it can be expressed in the material world. The title represents how important I think painting is and that it's as effective and stirring as performance, or any other art form or activist statement for that matter.

There's also the reference to the performative poetry and jazz of Gil Scott-Heron, which invokes that context of activity and vocality.

Yeah. In the months after making "Milk and Night," Nicole J. Caruth, at *Art21 Magazine*, invited me to write "[The Revolution Will Be Painted](#)." I adapted Scott-Heron's poem to express what I was talking about: that revolutionary acts are part of the process of painting and have to do with seeing, and the changeability and strength of subjectivity. And it's a textual version of that same urge. I read through all the art books I have, collecting sentences that jumped out at me, describing work by everyone across the ages from Willem de Kooning and Jean-Michel Basquiat to Cecily Brown and Edouard Manet. There are about 40 footnotes. I fit those lines into Scott-Heron's cadence, using excerpts where the writer hits on that flame you find in good painting.

And there's the poetic relationship between the painting and the spell you wrote for GAG, right?



Anne Sherwood Pundyk, excerpt from Mother's Projective Spell printed in *Girls Against God*, issue 2, 2014.

Yes, the chevron pattern in *The Revolution Will Be Painted*, developed from a piece I wrote for the second issue of GAG, which is all about witches past and present. I had researched spells and created a protective spell that a mother might cast over her children as they make their way in the world. I made a video to go with that piece and shot footage for it here in the countryside, and inside the house. At one point I turned around and saw my own shadow on a rug with a chevron pattern and had a sort of vision of the chevrons radiating out of my body. As a mother, I thought there was an appreciable power in that moment and all the things that go into that connection with your children, and I committed to using that shape as an assertive spiritual symbol in *The Revolution Will Be Painted*. That the different audiences for the work have been drawn to it based on its visual dynamic tells me it transcends my own personal experience of the forms.

Painting has a relationship to performance just by the fact that there is an action involved in making a mark. So you're not just talking about the personal, interior performance, but also that you were engaging with these artists and ended up with work that is a palimpsest of the performative aspect of painting — a material manifestation of what transpired.

Right. When I was making this painting in August it was *boiling* and there was no air conditioning in my TriBeCa studio, only a pitiful fan. I had a sad ballad by Bruce Springsteen, "The Last Carnival," on repeat while I was crawling on my hands and knees, painting, trying to cover this large red portion as I was running out of paint, and weeping to the song. Incidentally, the song is about the end of a season of a traveling circus and the dispersal of its performers. The line, "Where have you gone my handsome Billy?," also conjured my father, Dirck Brown, who died in 2002, who like my performance friends was charming and intuitive.

Like literally blood, sweat, and tears, right? And the whole thing might feel like a total disaster until it works.

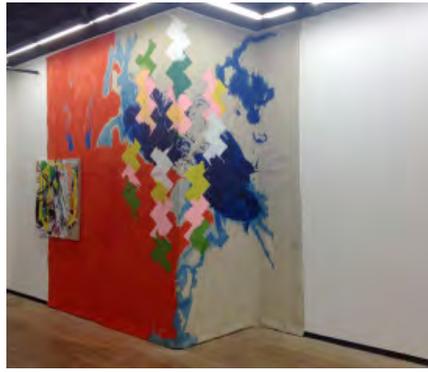
It subsumed me. But it was incredible. I had a very limited amount of time yet somehow I knew *exactly* what I needed to do — but as you said, utter failure was potentially lurking in the wings. I was trying to figure out what should go where and how the colors would read, which I think of as painting at its purist. I was also in some form of mourning, knowing that I'd already kind of left the sphere of that particular group of performance artists with whom I'd been enamored. I knew that the era was going to end and I would move out here and there was some new, really big chapter beginning. Consequently, this is a painting that, despite functioning very differently, connects deeply with my ongoing body of painting work.

One thing that I'm curious about is how an artwork's environment affects someone's relationship to it. You've shown this in different ways at different places. I wonder what you think about the painting's relationship to the place it's in right now and maybe in comparison to earlier iterations of it in other spaces.

It was interesting to bring it out to show you today: I had it all folded up and was thinking about how to install it here — whether it could be narrower or taller depending on which wall I chose. The way it reads is consistent throughout the different installations, which I attribute to the color, the scale, and the dynamic of the activity within oceans of neutral. It's physical malleability feels to me a bit like a protective nomad's tent with talismanic powers. It's now on the cover of the London based magazine, [HYSTERIA's fifth issue](#). I'm hoping that we can find some space to show it at its full capacity related to the issue's New York launch.



Anne Sherwood Pundyk, *The Revolution Will Be Painted*
(installation view at the artist's TriBeCa studio), 2012-ongoing.
Mixed media on canvas, 180 x 132 inches. Courtesy of the artist.



Anne Sherwood Pundyk, *The Revolution Will Be Painted*
(installation view at "Milk and Night," Gallery Sense), 2012-ongoing. Mixed media on canvas, 180 x 132 inches. Courtesy of the artist.

That's funny, that you have this piece that you, its author, have only ever seen once in its entirety.

Many of the decisions I made in painting it were done just by visualizing it as a whole; and even if I couldn't see certain portions, I could feel them viscerally.

Can you say, finally, why you wanted to talk about this piece? Why do you find this especially pertinent to your relationship to art and what you find in it?

I think because it's been with me through this epic process of unearthing and ultimate return to painting. The necessity of the individual authorship of the painting is as subversive as anything else. The whole experience of getting to the point of making it involved many unplanned, unexpected challenges, and I think that's part of art for me. It may not be a typical piece, but in terms of the aspects of my personality and ambition and commitment to

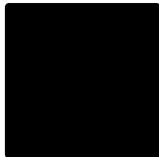
color in a very pure way, it's very characteristic of things that are important to me.

Anne Sherwood Pundyk is a painter and writer based in Manhattan and Mattituck on the North Fork. An excerpt from her multi-media story, [Worlds Within Worlds](#) will be published in the upcoming issue of *Familiars Quarterly*; she will present a video performance at the issue's launch event in May.



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